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Rethinking Adult Education in a Pancake World

Terilyn C. Turner

The world is flat, or so we are told by Thomas Friedman. What is the role of the adult educator when “what the flattening of the world means is that we are now connecting all the knowledge centers on the planet together into a single global network” (Friedman, p. 8). What does higher education look like? How do we design the curriculum? What is the role of teacher, administrator, librarian, or course developer? Who is our student? Where is our student? Can I keep my job and what job is it, anyway?

In 1984, Sherry Turkle wrote about the changes in language and the changes in meaning that were caused by our newfound friend, the computer. She expressly described a change in the meaning of “life” and “death,” on the part of children when working with computers and video games. Children did not view the computer as “just a machine,” but were willing to attribute some level of “consciousness” to its activities. Turkle wrote, “Technology catalyzes changes not only in what we do but in how we think. It changes people’s awareness of themselves, of one another, of their relationship with the world. The new machine that stands behind the flashing digital signal, unlike the clock, the telescope, or the train, is a machine that ‘thinks.’ It challenges our notions not only of time and distance, but of mind” (Turkle, p. 13). The pancake world also forces changing definitions for some of our most treasured words: “university,” “academic,” “dissertation,” “courses,” and “degree,” as they are challenged by the drive for a shared global meaning.

At the same time Turkle was trying to understand the impact of technology on language and our humanity, Shoshana Zuboff was analyzing the transformation of the world of work. Writing *In the Age of the Smart Machine* (1984), Zuboff states, “Choices that appear to be merely technical will redefine our lives together at work. This means more than simply contemplating the implications or consequences of a new technology. It means that a powerful new technology, such as that represented by the computer, fundamentally reorganizes the infrastructure of our material world. It eliminates former alternatives. It creates new possibilities. It necessitates fresh choices. The choices that we face concern the conception and distribution of knowledge in the workplace” (Zuboff, p. 5).

The point is that we’ve known for some time that the computer is more than “just a machine.” Teachers intuitively understood this concept from the outset. The computer irreparably altered the fabric of our lives and the act of teaching itself. Best illustrated through word-processing, the act of writing on the computer changed composition classes from laborious memorization of outlines, formats, and declension to a dynamic process where words could be inserted and changed at will.

Now, twenty-two years after going through massive technological adjustment in education, we need to address the result: a flat (or pancake) world. “It is now possible for more people than ever to collaborate and compete in real time with more other people on more different kinds of work from more different corners of the planet and on a more equal footing than at any previous time in the history of the world—using computers, e-mail, fiber-optic networks, teleconferencing, and dynamic new software” (Friedman, p. 8). This is the flat world and welcome to it, adult educators. “The flat-world platform is the product of a convergence of the personal computer (which allowed every individual to suddenly become the author of his or her own content) with fiber-optic cable (which suddenly allowed all those individuals to access more and more digital content around the world for next to nothing) with the rise of work-flow software (which enabled individuals all over the world to collaborate

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Pancake World *continued from previous page*

on that same digital content from anywhere, regardless of the distances between them). No one anticipated this convergence. It just happened—right around the year 2000” (Friedman, p. 11).

At a recent Minnesota Association of Continuing Adult Education (MACAE) Conference, at a session titled “Online Education,” the presenter provided a bibliography of resources. Of the twenty-four titles listed, all were dated 2000 or later; the sole exception being 1999. So, what are the implications of flattening on the world of higher and adult education?

Changes in Curriculum

At the MACAE conference, a panel discussion on change and future included the concept of “unbundling,” a technical term for breaking down information into smaller and smaller increments. The question was raised by a panelist of whether the integrity of the course was lost when the curriculum was dismantled, breaking it into smaller and smaller bits (or modularizing it) for learner consumption.

Certainly, the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) in a policy statement on “Faculty Rights and Responsibilities on Distance Education,” states, “The fundamental difficulty with institutions that rely heavily, or exclusively, on distance education is that they are characterized by a practice called ‘unbundling.’ In that practice, course materials are prepared by a ‘content expert’ and delivered by a ‘faculty facilitator,’ in a uniform manner, producing predictable and measurable ‘outcomes’ that fit uniform assessment tools. Such a process of turning education into modular units represents a basic change in an essential characteristic of higher education.”

The policy statement goes on to make the following recommendation: “The faculty member who teaches the course for use in distance education shall exercise control over the future use, modification, and distribution of recorded instructional material and shall determine whether the material should be revised or withdrawn from use” (<<http://www.aaup.org>>, Faculty Rights, p. 6).

In contrast to this position, another presentation at the MACAE conference, given by faculty at an online university, explained the process of “unbundling” as a way of freeing faculty and students from individual instructor vagaries and providing quality instruction through careful evaluation and revision on a constant basis. The drive for accountability at all levels of education is at the root of the unbundling of curriculum content.

Friedman explains this phenomenon from an economic perspective, saying “Any activity where we can digitize and decompose the value chain, and move the work around, will get moved around . . . No matter what your profession—doctor, lawyer, architect, or accountant—if you are an American, you better be good at the touchy-feely service stuff, because

anything that can be digitized can be outsourced to either the smartest or the cheapest producer or both” (p. 15). Friedman goes on to give examples of radiologists who are outsourcing the reading of CAT scans to doctors in India and Australia and online e-tutoring for American kids and parents provided by Indians in Koyampurath, India (pp. 16, 42).

The point is that any activity or work that can be disaggregated, will be disaggregated, and redistributed without regard to space or time. “Work gets done where it can be done most effectively and efficiently” (Friedman, p. 21). This redistribution means rethinking all of the roles occupied by those of us in higher education. If someone else can do what we do cheaper and as well or better, they will.

AAUP raises the issues for curriculum development in its policy guidelines: “Traditional notions of ownership, control, and use of educational materials are being challenged by the revolution in communications and technology. The authority and responsibilities of faculty members in this digital era with regard to how courses are developed, taught, and revised are in flux, and many existing institutional policies on these issues fail to address important questions raised in this changing environment” (<<http://www.aaup.org>>, Faculty Rights, p. 1).

Changes in Faculty

Nowhere are the changes in adult education more dramatically evident than in the composition of higher education faculty. Not only have the roles of faculty changed in terms of instruction and curriculum development, the demographics have changed as well. Today, 46% of all faculty hold part-time appointments in American higher education (<<http://www.aaup.org>> Contingent Faculty, p. 1). Based on the rate of growth in this area, the number of part-time faculty will quickly outnumber full-time faculty in the U.S. Indeed, at one online university the percentage of part-time faculty is 85%, while full-time represents only 15% of the total (Capella Fact Sheet, 7/1/06).

These facts stand in stark contrast to the policies advocated by AAUP for higher education faculty: “Excessive use of, and inadequate compensation and professional support for, such contingent faculty exploits these colleagues and undermines academic freedom, and academic quality, and professional standards....Part-time and non-tenure track appointments should be limited to no more than 15% of total instruction within an institution and no more than 25% within a department” (<<http://www.aaup.org>> Background Facts, p. 1, 3).

Adult educators need to talk with each other and learn from each other the changes that they are experiencing as a result of working in a pancake world. According to AAUP, “The complexity and expense of the resources needed to provide distance education courses have raised questions about the appropriate distribution of authority and control among the administration, academic departments or units, and faculty members” (<<http://www.aaup.org>> Faculty Rights, p. 1). Assumptions about faculty positions, whether instructor

or professor, curriculum developer or administrator, are challenged when work can be divided and reallocated according to standards that may or may not reflect excellent pedagogy.

Currently, 1.6 million students are enrolled in 54,000 on-line courses nationwide (which is) the fastest area of growth in higher education according to AAUP <<http://www.aaup.org>> Faculty Rights, p. 1). According to the Institute of International Education, India sent more students to college in 2004-2005 than any other country, except the United States. The expectation is that China will soon surpass India in the number of students enrolled in college. Friedman expresses great concern about whether the United States can maintain its economic edge based on the declining numbers of students enrolling in science and engineering in higher education. He is not alone; one teacher is quoted as saying, "If one puts his ear to the flat Earth, one can hear the competition from overseas. My goal as an educator is to stop being the best local school, or regional school, and start being the best on the planet (Friedman, p. 343).

Friedman also argues for a new vision of higher education, "Everyone should have a chance to be educated beyond high school . . . JFK wanted to put a man on the moon. My vision is to put every American man or woman on a campus" (Friedman, p. 374). Friedman's view is shared by Bill Brody, President of Johns Hopkins University, "If the flat world is about connecting all the knowledge pools together, we want our knowledge pool to be the biggest" (Friedman, p. 376).

Changes in Pedagogy

Not only are there changes in who we are and what we do in the pancake world, there are changes in how we do it. I just got back from ten days in Greece. While "away" I taught two graduate level courses from Amsterdam, Mykonos, and Athens. It was easy; I didn't even take my computer. I checked before I left, and both hotels had business centers where I taught my classes. But the unexpected treat was the Schiphol Airport Lounge in Amsterdam. With eight hours to kill, I knew there had to be a computer somewhere. An attendant directed me to a small, standing kiosk which happily accepted my credit card and where I selected "English" to conduct my business. I was given an exchange rate and time options from fifteen minutes to one hour. Once I made my selection, a ticker-tape-style printed slip gave me a password for the computer. It was just like getting gas from the gas pump, complete with receipt. An attractive circular bank of computers waited, set apart from the rest of the lounge, where I could bring my coffee and bagel to work. It took less than two minutes for me to access my class on the computer, where I checked on discussions, e-mails, and assignments for the next thirty minutes. It worked like a dream.

When I explain that I teach online *and* in a brick and mortar classroom, many people are astonished; none more so than fellow educators. I am frequently asked, "Don't you miss the

human contact? Don't you find on-line isolating?" I know my own answers to these questions, but I was curious about what others who were in a similar situation said, so I began interviewing colleagues who were teaching on-line. In most cases, they were also teaching in brick and mortar institutions with a variety of different course configurations. Some taught different classes online and stand-up, while others had courses that were combinations of both types of teaching. I interviewed four adjunct faculty members teaching in eight different institutions, including a large public university, an online university, a small private college, a two-year vocational college, and a business college. Their experience ranged from one to four years of teaching online.

All of them said they liked teaching online and they liked teaching in brick and mortar institutions. They said, to a person, that one was not better than the other, but "they were different." One colleague said, "I was told that teaching online is a lot more work and I think that's true...However, I really like it. I don't think it's better than standup teaching or worse; just different" (Protocol 2, Turner, 3/06). Another said, "I've observed that people in my class who are the most facile in technology are not the same people who take up the most space verbally in the regular classroom. What excites me every time is to see leadership coming from different people when we move to online" (Protocol 1, Turner, 3/06).

These are the conversations we need to have with each other. How do we combine the strengths of brick and mortar institutions with the flexibility and power of online instruction? How do we deal with the new curriculum push for "unbundling" courses while maintaining the integrity and complexity of subjects and constructs? How do we meet the employment needs of those who seek full-time positions, benefits, and increased wages with the new adjunct work force that is interested primarily in personal enrichment and intellectual stimulation?

Friedman has a lot of wonderful things to say, but one of his finest begins with a quote from Congressman George Miller: "Education is a process, not a place. Education must go on everywhere all the time—in schools, offices, at home, online, in the classroom, over your iPod—with conventional teachers, self-teaching methods, online games, whatever works" (p. 375). As online education moves beyond a cottage industry, it is time to posit a new form of education that does not attempt to conform to the old models of education which may or may not have provided the best quality of learning. Online education is not simply an alternative or a derivative of brick and mortar classroom instruction. It is not a substitute educational experience, to be used only when a student does not have access to the "real thing." Instead, we need to learn how to research and disseminate our findings as educators on the new instructional processes with all their variations; we need to rethink our institutions and our place within them to meet the challenges of adult education in a pancake world.

References and a biographical sketch of the author appear on page 9.

Globalization: The Next Hot Thing

by Paul Chapman

When you dial up support for your computer these days, the response may originate from Singapore or any number of other locations around the world. Your computer may have been built in Ireland. The operating system installed on the computer may have been coded in India. Sound familiar? Hop on a crowded subway train in London and you'll see half the riders with Apple iPods connected to their ears. Dine at a restaurant in Canton, China, and listen in to the half dozen cellphone conversations in progress at various tables. The odds are that no two will be in the same language. Welcome to what we now label globalization . . . a diffusion of culture and economics around the world.

The Theory

The modern globalization phenomenon really traces its origins to the nineteenth-century colonial commerce by Britain, France, Spain, Portugal, and Holland. In fact, the United States is one of the unintended consequences of the early colonization efforts. Do you know the No.1 country on the globalization index? It is Singapore . . . which got its start as a British trading outpost. Of course, these early versions of globalization were largely exploitative but it can be argued that the early versions laid the foundations for the modern phenomenon which some might suggest is still exploitative but on a more global scale.

What are the foundation stones of modern globalization? There are in fact many. A suitable economic system is a must. A social culture with an educated population is indispensable, but the list doesn't end there. So how do we determine where globalization will be successful and where it won't? The question brings to mind one of my teenage influences . . . Bertrand Russell. A British philosopher, Russell was one of the most brilliant minds of the twentieth century. As I recall, while he was studying at Cambridge University, he debated the pros and cons of writing a thesis on the Philosophy of Mathematics or the Philosophy of Economics. He wisely settled on the former though it was not until I was much older that I understood the wisdom of his choice. Mathematics is inherently orderly in terms of its structure whereas economics is inherently non-linear and disorderly. Globalization is a witch's brew of economics, politics, culture, and more, so we can expect it to be even more difficult than "simple" mathematics!

For reasons that are not well understood, our human brains are very poor at dealing with non-linear problems, and we typically try to reduce every solution to a linear model. Therein lies the problem with trying to analyze globalization. Perhaps if we limit our expectations, we can gain some understanding of what makes globalization tick.

Let's start by tabulating a list of variables in a hierarchy of importance or likelihood . . .

Level 1: People . . . education, culture

Level 2: Resources . . . food, health, wealth, geographical-advantage

Level 3: Organization . . . government, political system, economic system, unions

Level 4: Infrastructure . . . education system, legal system, banking system, transportation, communication, free press

Level 5: Social Order . . . this means an absence of international war, civil war, religious war, or class war.

Level 6: Singular Events . . . asteroid collision, earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, tsunamis, hurricanes, global warming, new ice age.

Without an exhaustive detailing of the impact of all of these variables, let me highlight a few. A country that has not educated its population cannot expect to have companies like Dell, IBM, or Microsoft knocking on their door. It is not by accident that one of Microsoft's most productive research facilities is located in China. So what should we make of the fact that the U.S. is falling behind in the training of engineers and scientists?

A country that cannot provide enough food or adequate healthcare for workers cannot expect to see manufacturing facilities springing up everywhere. Banking and legal systems that conform to international standards are an essential requirement for participating in globalization. Post-communistic Russia has found this out to its chagrin. What about social order? Well, if you're a CEO of a modern corporation, are you likely to consider taking advantage of cheap labor in Somalia or Lebanon for your new manufacturing plant? Not a chance!

The Level 6 Singular Events deserve special attention. Not because they prevent the spread of globalization but because they have the potential to terminate it in specific regions of the world. We know that a direct collision with a large asteroid has the potential to wipe out the entire human civilization, just as it did previously to the dinosaurs. The problem with considering asteroids is that we don't know where they will fall. We do know that the eruption of a super-volcano such as lies beneath the Yellowstone caldera could throw the world into another ice age at the very least. In the process, the United States could be taken out of the globalization circuit for generations. Scientists believe that Yellowstone is overdue

for another mega-eruption. On the basis of that fact alone, sustained globalization appears risky in the United States. It is thriving right now, but will it last? Does this mean that Microsoft should relocate its headquarters to Australia?

So, looking at our variable list, how can we model globalization numerically? If you value the advice of Bertrand Russell, you will stop here and find something more constructive to do with your time. On the other hand, I am going to risk making Bertrand turn in his grave. Given the number of variables and the virtually unlimited possible interactions between them, we cannot expect to produce a nonlinear model. Instead we can propose a statistical (econometric) model. In simplest terms, we can state that the probability of successful globalization can be stated by the equation:

$$G = R(1) \times R(2) \times R(3) \times R(4) \times R(5) \times R(6)$$

Where G is the probability of successful globalization, and R(n) is the composite reliability of the variables at level n, $0 \leq r \leq 1$.^{*} For example, R(6) represents the reliability of globalization in a region or country with a significant probability of a singular event like volcanic eruption. Also notice that if any reliability values above are zero, the probability of successful globalization becomes zero. It doesn't matter how good an education system a country has, if the country has an archaic legal system (Russia), or is beset by religious warfare (Iraq, Nigeria, Somalia), successful globalization in countries subject to these problems is unlikely. To put it another way, one weak link in the chain will cause the entire process to fail.

For readers who are having math attacks, let me explain a little. Each R number is a probability that globalization will work based on the variables for the corresponding level. Calculating a formula like this for G is easy. Defining it is tough. This is where Bertrand Russell chickened out, perhaps more wisely than I. We could toss a coin to establish the probability, but that would be meaningless. The problem is similar to that facing the weathermen. They can never know enough to predict tomorrow's weather with 100% certainty. They have to use models, which in turn project probability distributions. We have to do the same in our globalization model though in a more simplistic fashion.

Thus for example, if the value of R(6) is near zero in the imaginary country of Amoterra which is dominated by a large active volcano, we can confidently state that globalization is likely to fail. In essence, we're saying the R(6) is near zero or, in words, globalization is unreliable based on one or more of the Level 6 variables. In reality, we might ask the question . . . how active is the volcano? The answer would obviously affect the probability we chose for R(6). In the real world, we might also be expected to correlate the probability value with volcano characteristics such as the caldera size, the volcano's proximity to geological fault lines and many other factors that geologists use to predict eruptions. The toughest problem is time. If a

volcano is predicted to explode inside five years, we're looking at a much lower probability for R(6) than if it is predicted to explode in the next 100,000 years. Anyway, the problem really belongs to the geologists. We're just going to use their models.

The latter discussion outlines the scope of the task in creating a realistic model. We literally need to generate sub-models for every variable that globalization could depend on. No wonder Bertrand Russell preferred the simplicity of the Philosophy of Mathematics.

From these examples, it is clear that constructing a real model that could accurately predict the success of globalization is a mammoth task. But so was the task of modeling the weather. The process is relatively simple. Combine a team of Ph.Ds and a few supercomputers and keep them locked up until they come up with a result. The good news is that the exercise can be useful even if we don't have detailed models to predict the probabilities. We can learn a lot from just identifying the variables that affect the success of globalization.

The Case Study

It was 8 A.M. in his United Nations office as Ndavo Galamo turned off the webcam on his computer. Ndavo reflected on the conversation he had just had with Jeff Ottoson. Jeff was an aide to the Australian United Nations representative and he had just caught him in his Melbourne office after a night on the town. The previous week they had both attended the U.N. conference on Climate Change in Nairobi, Kenya. Whether in Melbourne or New York, conversations with Jeff were always stimulating, this time literally. Ndavo opened his browser to file a bookmark in his Delicious online favorites file for the Kamasutra site that Jeff had referred him to. After he had saved the file, he checked his Delicious file to make sure he had filed it correctly. He had. He noticed Jeff's alias as one of the most recent 2000 other aliases to have saved the Kamasutra link. Then Ndavo stored a reminder to tell Cecily about the site. It was less than thirty-six hours since he and Cecily had spent the night making love and planning their upcoming trip to his homeland of Borano, in the far reaches of the Pacific. He grinned with lustful pleasure as he wondered whether the Kamasutra web site might have spiced the night up.

At the ripe age of eighteen, Ndavo Galamo had been fortunate to receive an appointment as an aide to a Pacific Economic Affairs officer at the United Nations. Now seven years later, Ndavo had been able to gain a Ph.D. in Political Science and establish a network of friends among his U.N. contemporaries. He reopened his webcam and checked Cecily's webcam address. It wasn't active. He wasn't too surprised. It was only 2 P.M. in London, and Cecily was probably out and about. She'd probably picked up her dog and gone for a run in Hyde Park. Stewardesses knew the best way to shake off jetlag was activity and sunlight. He set the timer on his webcam to turn on around 4 P.M. when she would probably call him back.

^{*} This statement means that none of the terms R(n) in the equation can ever be negative or exceed 1.0. if globalization is to be successful.

The Next Hot Thing *continued from previous page*

Ndavo glanced at the World Bank briefing paper on his desk. That jogged his memory and he opened his Delicious favorites file again. He had noticed when he checked on Jeff's Kamasutra bookmark that his link to the World Bank Globalization brief had been saved by nine others. It was always useful to see if some of them had found some related links that he should know about. He had been giving a lot of thought recently to how Borano might be ushered into the globalized world. At the very least, he thought, they ought to be able to establish a medical research laboratory to conduct proteomics research. They were conveniently positioned between Hawaii, Japan, Korea, and Australia. Medical research required no significant raw materials. Borano had many well-educated emigrants that could be lured back to staff the lab. Most of them now worked in Pacific rim countries and would welcome the opportunity to return home.

He clicked on the alias for one of the other Delicious users, "michelmo" and looked for a globalization tag on his opening favorites page. Michelmo had none and besides that, half of his bookmarks were in French. He had more luck with the alias "ha.trung." His first page of bookmarks had a link to the International Monetary Fund view of globalization that he immediately downloaded and saved with his own Delicious favorites. He had even better luck with "nomad21" who led him to a site for the Centre for Research on Globalization, a Canadian site. Further down, he found a link to The Globalization Index, and noted that Singapore still ranked No.1. Last but not least, he found an intriguing download on a web site for the Minnesota Independent Scholars Forum.

The paper outlined a statistical analysis of the probability of successful globalization. As he scanned the paper, he found some good news and bad news. At the resource level, Borano had some severe limitations. Being located in the remote Pacific, they were far away from all trade routes. The island didn't even have an airfield big enough to accommodate the larger jets. This was strike 1. Everything in the analysis looked fine as far as Organization, Infrastructure, and Social Order. Then he noticed something at the Singular Events level—Global Warming. This was not what he wanted to think about. Whether it was due to global warming or not, the fact was that Pacific islands were already being inundated by rising tides. Since he was a teenager, he had seen Borano lose 20% of its beachfront. Shoreline crops were being killed by salt in the groundwater. Even though Borano was two meters higher than some of the really low-lying Pacific islands, the trend seemed relentless. Strike No.2.

Ndavo drummed his pencil rapidly on the edge of his desk. He was pissed and he was confused. On the right side of his desk, he had open a Pentagon analysis of the potential dire consequences of global warming . . . massive droughts, widespread dust storms, Bangladesh and Pacific islands uninhabitable, widespread nuclear blackmail, civil war in India

and Indonesia. It went on and on. Yet he and Jeff had just last week listened to Paula Dobriansky, the top U.S. official at the Nairobi conference, still refuse to ratify the Kyoto Protocol on industrial emissions cuts. On his computer screen, he browsed through some United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) reports. It was grim—Pacific island communities being relocated. Rising sea levels . . . some atoll islands were already completely submerged, current trends threatening the destruction of half the mangroves of some islands by the end of the century. Increasing surface water temperatures were yielding . . . dying coral reefs, disrupted fishery ecology, increased severe storm activity.

It wasn't just the Pacific region. They were also relocating Arctic communities for the same reason . . . rising water levels. Even worse were the dangers of glacial lake outburst floods (GLOF) in Nepal and Bhutan . . . rapidly melting glaciers causing glacial lakes to fill beyond the capacity of their banks, and then suddenly collapsing. This was the dark side of Globalization.

Ironically, participating economies in the globalized world were driving global warming and it was this same global warming that served as an obstacle to Boranu's joining in the globalization process. It was best summed up in a sentence in the U.N. watchdog Global Policy Forum's definition of globalization . . .

"But for billions of the world's people, business-driven globalization means uprooting old ways of life and threatening livelihoods and cultures. The global social justice movement, itself a product of globalization, proposes an alternative path, more responsive to public needs. Intense political disputes will continue over globalization's meaning and its future direction."

It wasn't fair! There were no checks and balances on rampant capitalism. It was time for action!

Paul A. Chapman grew up in Ireland and received his undergraduate education at University College Dublin. After emigrating to the United States, he obtained a Ph.D. in Chemical Engineering at the University of Minnesota. After a career in engineering, he became editor and publisher of the highly rated investment newsletter entitled "Hidden Value Stocks" and since 2001 he has been general manager of an investment hedge fund called "PEplus Capital L.P."

In a parallel life, Chapman played college soccer in Ireland and was coach of the University of Minnesota soccer program for seven years, taking them to the Big Ten Championship in 1976. Around the same time, alongside Rod Trongaard, he provided commentary for the Minnesota Kicks of the old North American Soccer league (NASL).

Chapman is a member of the Minnesota Independent Scholars Forum.

Globalization: Will it make or break us?

by Anne Auten

Recently Tim Pawlenty, the brashly conservative governor of Minnesota, put the state's higher education community on notice. He charged us to align our education programs to service the future needs of a *global* [author's emphasis] economy, and implied that this service is our primary mission. His charge echoed a call in the Spellings commission report for higher education reform released this past summer. The report told the U.S. Secretary of Education:

We want a world-class higher-education system that creates new knowledge, contributes to economic prosperity and *global* [author's emphasis] competitiveness . . . a higher-education system that gives Americans the workplace skills they need to adapt to a rapidly changing economy . . . (U.S. Dept. of Education, 2006, p. xi).

The Spellings report echoed one commissioned by an earlier Secretary of Education, Ted Bell. Almost a quarter of a century ago, *A Nation at Risk* called for high school and college reform. The Bell commission's recommendations focused on four internal workings of public education: content, expectations, time, and teaching, and were taken primarily by state legislatures as a signal to tighten high school graduation standards. It did little else. Twenty-three years later the Spellings commission also focused on four areas, but these were framed for external impact: access, affordability, quality, and accountability:

But were the American system of higher education—and those who want to help it rise to the challenges of a new century—to make the changes our commission recommends, we believe other important changes would follow. The result would be institutions and programs that are more nimble, more efficient, and more effective. What the nation would gain is a heightened capacity to compete in the *global* [author's emphasis] marketplace. (p. xiii)

A New Global Environment

The shift from the internal workings of education to responsiveness in an external competitive marketplace in less than a quarter century is striking, as a recognition of our global environment.

Another son of Minnesota turned journalist and political pundit rather than politician, Tom Friedman also put the U.S. education industry on notice in *The World is Flat* (2005). In this book he describes further evidence of the impact of globalization, which was his focus in *The Lexus and the Olive Tree* (2000). Friedman sets the stage by describing ten economic forces or "world flatteners" that he contends must refocus the U.S. education industry to meet external challenges and possibilities. His list includes the Berlin wall falling in 1989, Netscape going public in 1995, and the proliferation of such business practices as work-flow software, open-sourcing,

outsourcing and insourcing, offshoring and in-forming, and supply chaining. A chapter ominously titled "The Quiet Crisis" elaborates a message that American educators have heard for more than a decade: ". . . we should be embarking on an all-hands-on-deck, no-holds-barred, no-budget-too-large crash program for science and engineering education immediately" (2005, p. 275). Friedman's call to arms has been responded to around the country through various science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) initiatives, but has received insufficient and inconsistent federal support as demonstrated by cuts in funding for the National Science Foundation (NSF). NSF has historically been the country's primary supporter of science and engineering research (p. 255).

In a later chapter reinforcing the message that "This Is Not a Test," Friedman also presents nontraditional education in the "age of flat" with these challenges—leadership, muscle building, social activism, and parenting for character building (p. 280). According to Friedman, leadership bureaucracies must be intelligent, not necessarily with engineering degrees, but with at least "a basic understanding of the forces that are flattening the world" (p. 281). Workers must build "employability muscles" with access to portable benefits and opportunities for lifetime learning, not only to get jobs but to keep them as they develop in response to the forces of flatism (p. 284). Social activism must be strengthened through consumer education that shows how buying decisions and buying power are political, where each decision to purchase is understood as a vote for a type of corporate behavior. Education through parenting supported by schooling must address not only cognitive skills but also character building. "The fact is," Friedman asserts, "parents and schools and cultures can and do shape people" (p. 305), and one should add, their opportunities.

In a book based on the premise that "It's the economy, stupid," it may be understandable that there are so few pages allotted to the subject of public education and that those pages are critical of the subject. However, considering the press generated by a book written by a *New York Times* columnist and titled *The World is Flat* (as compared to a federal government report on the condition of U.S. education), Friedman, a high school graduate of what former Gov. Rudy Perpich proclaimed the "Education State," might have given more than ten pages to the "Education Gap." Nonetheless, Friedman points out several weaknesses in our education system that make us a nation at risk, one of them being the erratic nature of financial support for research in physical and mathematical sciences and engineering. This support *declined* as a share of GDP by whopping 37% between 1970 and 2004 (p. 268).

While Friedman concedes that "education in America is relatively decentralized and fragmented . . . [and] the public

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Make or Break *continued from previous page*

schools are overseen by fifty different state governments” he should also report that the majority of states give over local control and financial support of education to multiple independent school districts. Minnesota currently has 167 such districts. Friedman does not appear to recognize the common knowledge that financial support for nationwide educational reform movements instituted with federal monies is time-limited, with funding responsibility historically turned over to the states, who then share that responsibility with their school districts. The history of public education in this country describes case after case of reform movements that have waxed, waned, and finally withered as the money ran out; education reform initiatives are often resuscitated years or even decades later with new acronyms and new monies.

Following the practice of coining new words that Friedman used in his first look at globalization, *The Lexus and the Olive Tree* (2000), he identifies the influence of outside forces on values and standards for internal practice as “globalution” or revolution from beyond (2005, p. 301). He sees one example of such an outside influence on national support of this country’s education industry in the beginning of the space race:

President Kennedy understood that competition with the Soviet Union was not a space race but a science race, which was really an education race. Yet the way he chose to get Americans excited about sacrificing and buckling down to do what it took to win the Cold War—which required a large-scale push in science and engineering—was by laying out the vision of putting a man on the moon, not a missile into Moscow. (p. 283)

Friedman offers a possible remedy for the current state of STEM education in the U.S. by suggesting that President Bush could support a similar project as part of his legacy, one that is just crying for attention—“a national science initiative that would be our generation’s moon shot: a crash program for alternative energy and conservation to make America energy-independent in ten years” (p. 283). Friedman neatly sidesteps the point that deep financial pockets are typically required to implement and sustain any national education initiative.

However, Friedman does repeatedly address the need to build capital around the planet. Having sufficient capital is essential to effective education reform both in this country and others that we could look to as education investment partners in a global or “flat” world. Friedman’s image of a successful U.S. in a flat world depends on global adoption of a best practice of capitalism he calls “reform retail” (p. 317). He describes in many countries the successful practice of reform wholesale (p. 317); i.e., being open to foreign trade and investment and making some macroeconomic policy changes at the top.

However, Friedman sees that most countries have yet to engage in reform retail, which first involves a critical review of the key aspects of any society: infrastructure, regulatory institutions, education, and culture (or the general way the country’s

leaders relate to the rest of the world), and then a makeover of those factors that do not support an ownership society. He backs up this perspective with the World Bank’s International Finance Corporation (IFC) research that found state-owned or subsidized companies have been unproductive and massive investments in education haven’t guaranteed sustainable productivity growth (Egypt is given as one example). On the other side of the balance sheet, countries grew out of poverty when they created environments that made it easy for their people to start businesses in terms of local rules, regulations, and license fees; hire and fire workers; enforce a contract; get credit; and close a business that goes bankrupt or is failing (p. 318).

Where will capitalism work?

The IFC criteria that ground the first two elements of Friedman’s reform retail (infrastructure and regulatory institutions), were based on the work of Peruvian Hernando de Soto’s Institute for Liberty and Democracy (ILD) founded in Lima in 1987. The ILD’s singular focus is building an inclusive property system based on the rule of law that sustains a market economy for poor and middle classes. The ILD believes (and the IFC concurs) that property law is what makes the market economy work, providing the framework of rules that organizes the market, the titles and records that identify economic agents, and the contractual mechanisms that allow people to exchange goods and services in an expanded market.

In *The Mystery of Capital* (2000), a readable work on the importance of an inclusive property system, de Soto presents an engaging explanation for why capitalism seems to work only in the West but fails everywhere else. Focusing on the infrastructure needed for capital formation, he describes how poor people’s assets only produce what their use-value or exchange-value permits rather than their symbolic value, as collateral for loans, for example. The ILD approach initiates the reform retail that Friedman sees as vital to achieving a highly functioning global, or flat, world. This approach includes:

- 1) understanding that the institution of property is the hidden architecture of capital;
- 2) bringing the poor and their customs into center stage;
- 3) making the head of state the champion of market reforms and the poor.

According to the London *Telegraph*, the ILD has created one of the four big ideas in modern times for improving the lot of the world’s poor (ILD, 2006, Introduction-Recognition section).

Conclusion

Friedman acknowledges that the world is not flat and that he used literary license in titling a book *The World Is Flat* “to draw attention to this flattening and its quickening pace because . . . it is the single most important trend in the world today” (2006, p. 375). He continues:

But I am equally certain that it is not historically

inevitable that the rest of the world will become flat or that the already flat parts of the world won't get unflattened by war, economic disruption, or politics. There are hundreds of millions of people on this planet who have been left behind by the flattening process or feel overwhelmed by it, and some of them have enough access to the flattening tools to use them against the system, not on its behalf (p. 375).

Having had the opportunity for international travel funded by a university employer and because I am currently working in an increasingly diverse community college with an open enrollment policy, I read *The Lexus and the Olive Tree* and *The World is Flat* with an eye to issues beyond how to globalize a free market. I am deeply embedded in the "education industry" and believe that globalization could either make or break what we seek to do as educators at all levels, depending on if and when market reforms include the poor and honor their customs. It would be naïve to assume that those on the margins will remain passive as globalizing forces push them further and further to the edge where sustaining their very lives is in jeopardy. Such marginalization poses significant ethical challenges for business and political decisions. It also means that federal support for U.S. education could evaporate as resources shift to quelling rebellions and riots by those for whom a flat earth means falling off the edge into an abyss.

Educators have the opportunity to help form the future in a world in which interdependence increasingly becomes normative. We can do this in at least a couple of ways. First, by grappling with the "big questions" posed by market forces, we can be intelligently proactive when those forces tell us what is to be our primary mission. Second, by examining our curricula and institutional missions, we can insure that the issues of a global society are examined fairly but critically.

The possibilities of globalization must be tempered by an understanding of the risks and responsibilities of all citizens to be attentive to the fundamental values of justice, compassion, equity, and the common good. As educators, I believe we bring particular insight and wisdom that need to be part of the theoretical interpretations of the future such as those teased out by Friedman and others. For us not to be present is to reduce everything in a flat world to economics.

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Afterwords . . .

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Contributors to this issue:

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When I suggested *The World is Flat* as the basis for this issue of *PT*, everyone seemed to be reading the book. My co-editor agreed to use Friedman's book as a basis for this issue, but mentioned that he had a friend who felt that Tom Friedman was a capitalist tool (or words to that effect). I read *The World is Flat* with this comment in mind and, indeed, felt by the time that I was done, that Friedman had perhaps sold out to a completely economic world view. I am grateful to the authors who wrote for this issue for picking up non-economic themes and working with them. Paul Chapman's wry piece points out the fact that globalization is much more than an economic phenomenon. Anne Auten and Terilyn Turner correctly latch onto the fact that Friedman criticizes the U.S. educational system without offering much in the way of suggestions for improving it. They aptly point out the important roles that education and educators play in a "flat" world.

While I was waiting for these articles to come in, and because I was looking for another point of view, I read *The Temptations of the West: How to be modern in India, Pakistan, Tibet, and Beyond* by Pankaj Mishra. (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2006).

In this book, Mishra, an Indian journalist educated at Oxford, visits various political leaders and politicians in countries that abut India such as Nepal, Afghanistan, and Kashmir—in addition to those named in the title. As the book jacket says, Mishra "sees the pressures (the temptations) of Western-style modernity and prosperity and adroitly teases out the paradoxes of globalization." Mishra's style is somewhat autobiographical and discursive and the western reader should have a map along side, but he gives a very immediate picture of the state of these Asian nations.

Among the points Mishra makes are that all people want dignity and freedom, stability, and some control over their lives. But a rising middle class, such as is emerging in India, is inherently conservative and not likely to allow much opportunity for those in the lower classes. For example, sons of Kashmiri peasants who get an education with the expectation that they will qualify for government jobs cannot find such jobs, particularly if they are Muslim in a Hindu-dominated area. Nor can they go back to the farms from which they came.

Even if economic possibilities were there, daily stability is seriously threatened by religious animosity. Mishra points out that ethnic groups, such as Muslims in a Hindu culture, fear that they will be swallowed by the dominant culture; this fear often brings ethnic groups to the point of bloodshed and revolution. Just preventing bloodshed and revolution is not likely to result in democracy, because pacifying ethnic minorities usually gives power to the military and the bureaucracy.

Moreover, many Asian countries, Afghanistan in particular, arrived in the late twentieth century without—in effect—passing through the nineteenth century. They are not at all equipped at all for anything like democratic government. Nonetheless, the ideology of democracy is out there in front of them. Their frustration at not being able to achieve freedom and dignity only promotes rage and despair.

These are only some of the problems Mishra sees with the gospel of globalization. I would say that we need to grasp the ideal of globalization very cautiously. We need to remember that equality and stability, in addition to education, are necessary components of democracy.

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Errata: David Weseley's last name was misspelled (as Wesley) in our last issue due to a proofreading error. The editors extend their apologies to the author.

A New Year and Its Resolutions

Making resolutions is a distinguishing ritual as one year turns into another. The change is a liminal moment evoking images of new beginnings. We also know that as the days of the new year slip by so do many of the resolutions to live differently.

The discussion in this issue of *Practical Thinking* about Thomas Friedman's book strikes me as a moment rich for resolve. The notion of a "flat world" is an apt metaphor for the promise and peril of contemporary life and the challenges it poses to us as citizens. On the one hand, the elimination of barriers to communication, travel, and access to resources provides a time of unprecedented leveling. According to Friedman and others, this global community alters fundamental ways in which we understand the ideas of the state, governance, culture, and even community. An obstacle-free world in which wealth becomes the primary language and the market becomes the measure for the rightness of decisions intrigues us. It should also give us pause as we think about what this means for the wide range of disparity that exists.

It is that very disparity, however, that makes a flat world dangerous. Indeed, an earlier belief that the world was really flat and that one could fall off its dark edge may be a balancing image to the promise of an abundant future. The flattening of the world has done little to address the calamity that is Iraq. Nor has our instant awareness of what is happening in every part of this planet enabled us to respond to the tragedy that daily grows worse in the Sudan or any number of places where deprivation and fear rule. While we read about individuals and corporations enjoying unprecedented wealth, we live in a society in which millions of people cannot access adequate health care and where public education flounders for lack of significant investment to sustain its work. Flat world thinking says that all boats will rise in an economic blossoming. That is unlikely to occur as a by-product anymore than it did when trickle-down theories were popular. Wide-scale benefit requires wide-ranging intentional action. And communal resolve.

This new era, perhaps more than any other, needs a committed citizenry for whom the ideas of social conscience and common good are operative in public discourse. But the idea of common good seems to be in short supply. If letters to the editors tap into the psyche of contemporary Americans, the ideas of common good and social conscience are at best viewed as antique and at worse as a sign of weakness. People resist calls for action that will increase their tax contributions to a public coffer intended to address unmet needs. As one motivational speaker recently framed it, "I am tired of being taxed for other people's stupid decisions." We readily recognize in this comment that the "others" are the poor and anyone else who may stumble in the course of life. While we read a lot about a longing for community, it usually ends up being a desire to form a small circle of friends, relatives, and associates as a barrier against the "other." Community has less and less to do with the hard work of discovering how diverse lives intersect around shared values.

I am aware, even as I paint a somber picture, that there is another side to consider. People continue to volunteer to change the lives of individuals; moreover, there are those working for systemic change. The notion of a common good may not be as galvanizing as it was three decades ago, but it still motivates the way people vote, spend their money, think about their place in the world, and make daily decisions. The resolution not to abandon the idea of the common good is worthy of a New Year because in it lies an excellent corrective to the fear and worry we feel whenever we face a new economic theory on the horizon.

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